



Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Short Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 2013.

Jewett has already published a massive commentary on Paul's letter to the Romans in the Hermeneia series but the commentary at hand is not merely a reader's digest edition of that work. It is a shorter commentary intended for a wider audience and accordingly it addresses its intended audience. The publisher claims on its website that

*Robert Jewett's 1,000-page commentary on Romans in the Hermeneia series (2008) was a landmark in the interpretation of Paul's most complex—and some would say, most important—letter: “a new benchmark for the genre” (David deSilva); “readable and profound” (Luise Schottroff); “the new authoritative reference work for scholars” (Daniel Patte). It has also been the focus of international conferences and conversations ever since its publication.*

*Taking account of those far-reaching conversations, Jewett now brings the best insights of the larger commentary into a more compact and accessible form, ideal for use in college and graduate courses.*

I disagree- it isn't just ideal for college and graduate courses, it's useful for anyone interested in the book of Romans whether they be seasoned academics or new adult readers of that Biblical text.

Jewett's skill as an exegete is manifest on every page but even beyond that his skill as an honest exegete- as one who is unwilling to bend the text to suit the tastes of ideology is also plainly and amply demonstrated.

Take, for instance, his exegesis of 1:18-32, a text which hardly need be pointed out as central to discussions of Christianity and homosexuality. Jewett writes

Those who choose a dishonest heart are required to live out the life imposed by its twisted desires (p. 25).

Further-

... Paul's aim is not to prove the evils of perverse sexual behavior; that is simply assumed in his Christian audience. The aim is to develop a thesis about the manifestation of divine wrath in the human experience of Paul's time. ... [S]exual perversion is in Paul's view "the result of God's wrath, not the reason for it" (ibid.).

And

[Vv. 26-27 are] particularly damaging to the popular hypothesis that the references to homosexuality in this passage relate solely to pederasty and thus have no bearing on homoerotic relationships between consenting adults. Paul's language served to remove any vestige of decency, honor, or friendship from same-sex relations (v. 26).

Throughout, Jewett's interpretation is unblinking and unafraid to reiterate what Paul is saying in Romans rather than what readers may wish Paul were saying. And, importantly, the theory of Doug Campbell is completely absent. Indeed, he isn't even footnoted or referenced in the bibliography (in much the same way, I hasten to say, the history of interpretation will deal with his views on Romans in due course).

The work of Jewett doesn't suffer from numerous sidetracks or diversions either. He explains the text and he remains in communication with the text and in dialogue with Paul throughout. With open ears he listens carefully and then passes along to his readers what Paul's letter to Rome has declared.

Penultimately, Jewett also isn't afraid to discuss the modern implications of Paul's letter for Christians. He does so in his exegesis of Rom 1:18-32 as we saw above and he does it in his exposition of Rom 11 (concerning Israel and universal salvation) and Rom 13 (the Christian and the State). He remarks of Rom 11:1-36

Unless one is prepared to manipulate details so that the expectation of "all Israel" being converted to the gospel of the crucified Messiah is not so crassly invalidated by history, the implications of nonfulfillment must be faced (pp. 161-162).

And finally, Jewett is also self-critical in his work, writing in his exposition of Rom 13

At the end of the Hermeneia commentary's discussion of this passage I argue.... What I overlooked in this critical conclusion was the practical political alternative that Paul and other early followers of Jesus were facing: whether to follow the Jewish zealots in their campaign to overthrow Rome and establish a theocratic world empire in Jerusalem, or to acquiesce in Rome's rule that had brought a modicum of peace to the Mediterranean world (pp. 171-172).

In an appendix Jewett offers readers a very fine, very vivid rendering of his own of Romans and then they are treated to a thorough bibliography to aid in further reading and research.

Jewett is a model scholar and interpreter: honest, truthful, fearless, intelligent and precise. This 'short commentary' is worth a long read and an even longer pondering.

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